

**Testimony of Mark Wildey
Manager of Communications Technologies
West Metro Fire Protection District**

**Before the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation,
Subcommittee on Communications
United States Senate**

**Hearing on S.800: *The Wireless Communications and
Public Safety Act of 1999***

May 12, 1999

Biography
Mark Wildey
Manager, Communications Technologies
West Metro Fire District, Colorado

Mark Wildey is currently serving in his third year as Communications Technologies Manager for the West Metro Fire Protection District. West Metro is the largest Fire District in Colorado.

Mark has invested over twenty-seven years in the field of Public Safety communications. He served as installation and implementation manager for one of the first E-9-1-1 centers in the metro Denver area during the mid-1980s. As an EMT and co-author of Colorado's Emergency Medical Dispatch program in the early 1980s, he assisted in deploying the program to rural and urban Dispatch Centers across the state.

In addition to his duties at West Metro, Mark currently chairs the technical committee for the Jefferson County 9-1-1 Authority Board. Prior to coming to West Metro, Mark worked as a independent consultant for the Fire Service and as Information Systems Manager and Deputy Director of Communications for another large metro Denver Fire Department.

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Good morning, Chairman Burns and members of the subcommittee. I am Mark Wildey, the Manager of Communications Technologies for the West Metro Fire Protection District. West Metro covers a 120 square mile area that includes an easternly portion of Jefferson County, Colorado. Columbine High School in Littleton is in an area immediately adjoining our jurisdiction. We were one of the public safety agencies (PSAPs) that responded to the crisis at Columbine High School on April 20.

Since the purpose of this hearing is to discuss wireless enhanced 9-1-1, I would like to tell you a little bit about that tragic day in Littleton and explain how wireless phones played a role in saving lives.

On the morning of April 20, our district received a preliminary report of activity about a weed fire near the school. We dispatched a unit to handle it and our people determined that the fire was caused by a backpack that contained motion activated explosives. That was the beginning of what would be a long and harrowing day for everyone in our community. From that point on, until 18:18 that night our district had paramedic units as well as command staff stationed at Columbine High School.

West Metro received a total of 48 Fire and EMS calls that day. Along with 14 other public safety agencies in the area, we fielded 9-1-1 calls, dispatched emergency units and personnel, and tried to bring order out of chaos. In my agency we have forty cell phones and we had over half of them in use on April 20. Our wireless phones enabled our people to communicate with other public safety personnel at various points around the school and to talk to those of us at headquarters without tying up the wireline 9-1-1 trunks. Cellular provides an important communications link where often times interagency radio interoperability falls short for a myriad of reasons.

Equally important as the cell phones we used were the ones used by the students. Because of wireless phones, we were able to maintain contact with individuals inside the school. They helped us know which people inside were secure and which people were in immediate danger. This allowed the direction of SWAT teams and then ultimately paramedics.

While wireless phones were a huge help to public safety, the technology still has limits when it comes to 9-1-1. One of the cell phone calls we received that day reported that a party in the gym was bleeding very badly. A SWAT team was sent to the gym and found no injured parties and no signs of blood. In the middle of this horrific tragedy, someone had made a prank call to 9-1-1, and we had no way of knowing who it was. This false alarm forced us to commit precious resources where they were not needed.

These are just a few examples of why Sen. Burns' 9-1-1 bill is so important. Wireless phones are vital to 9-1-1. But we need wireless enhanced 9-1-1. We need to have call-back numbers and location information for people who call 9-1-1. We must have a path to be able to reconnect with people if the line gets disconnected. We need to know where to find people who call for help.

More and more of our emergency calls are coming from wireless phones every day. In my center, I estimate that 20 to 30 percent of our 9-1-1 calls come from wireless phones. That means that 20 to 30 percent of the time, my dispatchers have no idea where the callers are or how to get in touch with them.

We have a migratory population today. Thanks to wireless phones, it is a population that can be in constant communication. More and more people carry phones with them wherever they go, knowing that help is only a phone call away. Through the media we have educated the public to expect not only 9-1-1 but that the 9-1-1 calltaker will have the ANI and ALI information. A majority of cellphone users have no idea that currently ANI and ALI are not provided for Fire and Police Dispatchers when a 9-1-1 call is made. For those of us in public safety though, we need more tools. We have seen how enhanced 9-1-1 has reduced emergency response times on the wireline side. We need to implement wireless enhanced 9-1-1 so we can achieve similar results on the wireless side.

By passing the Wireless Communications and Public Safety Act of 1999, the Congress will advance the deployment of wireless enhanced 9-1-1. So often it is tragedy that draws our attention to 9-1-1. But I am here today to thank you for the positive attention you bring to 9-1-1. This legislation, S. 800, can help public safety save thousands of lives. Thank you for the opportunity to share my views with you today.